

VOLUNTEER PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

Executive Development

Volunteer Officer Performance Appraisal

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### Abstract

The problem addressed was inconsistent performance of volunteer leaders due to the lack of an appraisal feedback tool. The purpose of this research is to assess performance evaluation programs and methods for improving volunteer officer performance.

A descriptive research method was used to answer the following questions. What performance evaluation programs are other agencies with volunteer personnel using? What are key components to an effective performance evaluation system? What methods are in use to improve performance of volunteer officers? Volunteer officers believe performance evaluations should be based on what criteria?

Processes used in conducting research include literature review, survey, and focus group comprised of volunteer officers. Results show that volunteer agencies benefit from an effective performance appraisal system in the same manner as career agencies. Recommendations include officer job analysis to update position descriptions and development of a volunteer evaluations system.

### CERTIFICATIONS STATEMENT

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotations marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Introduction

According to the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA), 822,850 men and women in the United States make a commitment to serve their community as volunteer firefighters (FEMA-USFA 2002). North Lincoln Fire & Rescue District #1 (NLF&R) is one of the fire agencies benefiting from the commitment to serve made by volunteers. MacLeod (1993, p. 153) states that, “a performance review is part of the commitment made by organizations to volunteers”. The performance appraisal system, when properly designed and implemented, is an essential part of a successful fire department (Edwards 1993). North Lincoln Fire & Rescue District #1 (NLF&R) has no formal performance appraisal feedback tool for volunteer battalion chiefs. This may contribute to inconsistent performance, and no system to correct poor performance or recognize outstanding performance of personnel in key leadership positions.

The purpose of this research is to assess performance evaluation programs and methods for improving volunteer officer performance within North Lincoln Fire & Rescue.

A descriptive research method was applied to answer the following questions. 1) What type of performance evaluation programs are in use by other agencies with volunteer personnel? 2) What are the key components to an effective performance evaluation system? 3) What other methods are in use to improve performance of volunteer officers? 4) Volunteer officers believe they should be evaluated on what criteria?

## Background and Significance

North Lincoln Fire & Rescue formed six years ago with the merger of two fire districts. Each of these districts provided emergency services to the community for more than sixty years. During the last 6 years, NLF&R reorganized the paid administration, which now is comprised of a Fire Chief, Fire Marshal, Training Chief, Maintenance Chief, Two Office Administrators, and two part-time personnel. North Lincoln Fire & Rescue responds to approximately 1200 emergency calls each year, relying upon sixty volunteers to provide emergency services.

The fire district maintains six fire stations and twenty-eight emergency vehicles to provide services to an eighty square mile district, which includes the City of Lincoln City, a coastal resort community. The volunteers provide firefighting, water rescue, emergency medical service (EMS), vehicle extrication, hazardous materials first response, and fire prevention programs in the schools. One of the three volunteer battalion chiefs supervise a district battalion comprised of two stations and equipment and personnel assigned. The battalion chiefs are supervised by the fire marshal/operations chief who reports to the fire chief.

North Lincoln Fire & Rescue District #1 (NLF&R) has no formal performance appraisal feedback tool for volunteer officers. Edwards (2005, p. 154) states, “the overriding purpose of an effective performance appraisal system is to link employee performance to the goals of the organization...” Without an effective appraisal system, NLF&R has no process to link the goals of the district with the volunteers of the district. This has contributed to performance which many times is inconsistent with district goals, with no system to correct poor performance or recognize outstanding performance of personnel in key leadership positions.

The National Fire Academy Executive Fire Officer Program requires each student to complete an applied research project at the end of each course. This research is related to Unit-one, *Leadership* (National Fire Academy [NFA], 2004). As part of the Executive Development class, this author was evaluated by officers supervised. Personnel evaluations are a primary tool to evaluate and develop leadership skills. This research also relates to Unit-2 *Team* (NFA 2004). The focus group formed as part of this research will be required to reach a consensus on their recommendation. This research relates to the United States Fire Administration (USFA) operational objective-4, "To promote within communities a comprehensive, multi-hazard risk-reduction plan led by the fire service organization." (NFA 2004, Self-study guide, p. 3) By developing the leadership ability of the officers within the fire service, we are preparing them to be leaders within our community.

This researcher, utilizing a survey to collect data from agencies currently evaluating volunteer performance, will utilize a descriptive research method. I will also form a focus group applying techniques instructed in unit two of the Executive Development (NFA 2004) course. Facilitators trained by me will guide the focus group. I will monitor the process to assure consistency, and that project goals are met. (Appendix F)

### Literature Review

*Research Question #1: What Type Of Performance Evaluation Programs Are Being Used By Other Agencies With Volunteer Personnel?*

The literature review revealed that there is vast information regarding personnel evaluations of employees' job performance. There was much less information available regarding performance evaluations of volunteer personnel.

In the State of Maryland, the Governor's Office on Service and Volunteerism (GOSV) provides support to organizations that have volunteers. According to the GOSV, two million Marylanders volunteered in 2001 (GOSV 2001). To assist the many agencies in Maryland to develop and manage a volunteer program, the GOSV developed an online resource, the Best Practices for Developing a Volunteer Program (GOSV, [www.gosv.state.md.us/volunteerism/bestprac](http://www.gosv.state.md.us/volunteerism/bestprac)). This ten-part guide includes a section on Volunteer Performance Evaluation and Measuring Volunteer Program Effectiveness. The program goals include: determine if the volunteer is meeting current objectives, how well they are accomplishing assigned duties, and identify additional training needs and the setting of new goals. If the volunteer's performance is substandard, options are given to correct performance such as re-training, re-assignment, discipline or retirement. It is also recognized as an opportunity for feedback from the volunteer, and as a tool in determining the overall effectiveness of the volunteer program.

The criteria used to evaluate volunteers are the same as used to evaluate paid staff in the Maryland GOSV program (GOSV, Best practices)

#### Skills

- Dependability

- Cooperation

- Effective communication

- Problem solving

#### Accomplishments

- Supports organizational vision and mission

- Meets goals and objectives of position

### Completes assigned tasks

The Maryland GOSV program calls for regular evaluations but does not set exact intervals. Their system also calls for self-evaluation by the volunteer and emphasizes showing the volunteer the positive contributions they are making to the organization.

The National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) is an organization that has over 70,000 volunteers in more than 900 programs nationwide (<http://www.nationalcasa.org/index-1.htm>). This researcher studied documents on the National CASA Association website including: Sample Volunteer Management Policies, Sample Volunteer Evaluation Form, and related Volunteer Management documents.

Like the Maryland's GOSV program, CASA advocates that volunteers should receive performance appraisals on a regular basis, which typically occurs after the first six months and then yearly. CASA also states, "Volunteers should be apprised of their performance just as though they were professional paid staff" (CASA 2000)

The goal of the CASA appraisal program is to provide feedback and guidance to the volunteer to improve their on the job performance. CASA documents emphasize that the appraisal process is not a punitive process, but should be a positive and helpful experience for the volunteer. Other goals their program includes is to solicit feedback and suggestions on CASA program improvements.

The National CASA (2000) Association recommends the volunteer appraisal process begin by rating the member's performance in each of the following areas. It also recommends a review of prior goals, accomplishments, review of self-appraisal, and goal setting for next year.

Below is a summary of CASA's volunteer evaluation form (CASA 1999). Volunteers are rated by supervisors on a one to five scale on the following criteria:

Professionalism

- Understanding purposes and goals of CASA
- Understands and compliance with confidentiality of clients
- Relates well with public
- Exhibits poise in handling difficult situations
- Exhibits sincere interest and enthusiasm to work and clients

Responsibility

- Reliable about schedule and time commitments
- Completes assignments on time
- Attention to detail when necessary
- Willingness to accept assignments

Effectiveness

- Welcomes opportunities to learn how to be more effective
- Follows through on assignments
- Willing to ask questions
- Uncovers and communicates all pertinent facts

The second part of the CASA volunteer evaluation sample document (CASA 1999)

is completed by the volunteer. The volunteer is asked to rate the following on a one to five scale.

Orientation and Training

Goals and purposes of CASA clearly explained

The job description for your position was reviewed and explained

Training was effective in providing tools to perform assigned tasks

#### Supervision

Supervisor was available for questions or needed information

Supervisor's attitude was one of professional regard

Lines of supervision were clear

A search of the Learning Resource Center (LRC) online resource found many applied research projects (APR) that explored different aspects of employee appraisals. Their findings are not included here because their research did not include the appraisal of volunteer performance. (Stipp, 1999; Klauber, 1999; Cooper, 2000; Strahan, 1999; Cooper, 2000).

In summary, the Maryland program and the CASA program are very similar. Both programs say volunteers should be reviewed in the same manner as paid staff. Each of the programs has similar criteria and are based on the volunteers' job description, and use the evaluations as a tool to receive feedback used to evaluate the overall volunteer program. The CASA programs sample form based is on a graphic rating scale of 1 to 5 (CASA 1999), where the Maryland program does not offer any suggestion to the type of assessment tool used. (GOSV, Best practices) Both systems suggest a self-assessment by the volunteer. The GOSV program does not go into detail, leaving this researcher to believe that both supervisor and volunteer would use the same criteria and tool. CASA, in contrast, has the volunteer evaluate the training and supervision provided by CASA (CASA 1999). Both Maryland and the CASA program emphasize that assessments are to be positive and not negative experiences for volunteers.

*Research Question #2: What Are The Key Components To An Effective Performance Evaluation System?*

Effective Supervisory Practices edited by Mary L. Walsh and published in 1994 by International City/County Management Association (ICMA) brings out five components for effective employee evaluations system. In chapter-8, *Evaluating performance* (Holtz 1994) Identifies the first step is a goal-setting meeting that takes place with the new employee in the first three to six months, and at least annually there after. The employee and supervisor cooperatively agree upon goals designed to meet the responsibilities of the employee's job description. The second step is to set standards of performance. Again, this should be a cooperative effort of the supervisor and employee. Step three is a formal evaluation and is completed on an annual basis, but informal frequent communications providing support and feedback to employees is considered a necessary part of the evaluations process. The fourth step is to review and set new goals for the next evaluation period. A team evaluation is the fifth step of the ICMA process. This differs from the other systems this researcher examined. Each work unit is evaluated to determine how well the team is meeting their goals and objectives.

The ICMA system was unique among the evaluation systems this research examined in one respect: there is no set form or criteria established to evaluate employees as stated in text. (Holtz 1994, p.97) "You cannot make all employees fit the same evaluation system any more than all police officers will fit into the same size uniform", therefore, each supervisor is encouraged to create an evaluation system that is "...tailor-made for each employee..." (p. 97). The supervisor needs to answer three questions when setting up an employee's evaluation system:

What is the purpose of this evaluation?

What do I need to know to achieve this purpose?

What information do I need to collect to support the evaluation? (p. 97)

This method also creates a unique record system to accommodate these tailor-made evaluation systems. Supervisors record goals, job production, achievements, actions they take to help the employee and recognitions the employee receives. Supervisors also record their impressions of the employee and how they feel about actions, such as how hard it was for an employee to reach their goals, or how the supervisor feels about the employee's long term career interests. The purpose of recording their impressions is to aid the supervisor during his evaluation and defend his evaluations, if necessary. When an employee transfers to another supervisor, these impressions are removed from the file so as not to bias the next supervisor. (Holtz 1994)

Edwards (2005) states that the purpose of an appraisal system is to link the actions of the employees to the goals of the organization, provide feedback to employees, and provide management with information for decision-making. Edwards (2005, p. 154) goes on to chart out what he calls the "major elements of the performance appraisal system" outlined below.

*Performance Criteria* must first be established to assure consistency in performance reviews. This process includes a thorough job analysis. The author suggests using an existing recognized standard, but emphasizes that linkage must be made between the job analysis and the standard.

*Training* of the supervisors and employees is an essential component of the evaluation system. Employees are educated on how the system is implemented into the organization. Supervisors must be trained on how to rate performance (Edwards 2005).

During the *Expectations-Setting Meeting* step, the goals are set, and supervisors and employees discuss levels of performance that meet expectations. “The person who is to be evaluated should have carefully considered input into this process” (Edwards, 2005, p. 155).

Ongoing *Feedback* is simply keeping lines of communication open during the evaluation period. Informal appraisals or coaching is encouraged and occurs whenever necessary, and employees bring forth issues effecting performance that may require supervisors to modify their performance. These communications should be positive, focusing on improvements to accomplish.

*Self-Assessment* is the process where the employee conducts a form-guided self-evaluation prior to the mid-year and annual evaluations.

*Midway Feedback Session* is not a formal evaluation, more like a performance review. Supervisors meet with each employee to review the goals and expectations established during the expectation meeting. The formal review forms may be used to guide the discussion so that the employee understands the key points. This meeting allows the supervisor and employee to discuss progress and make any modifications that are necessary to accomplish goals. Supervisors should record all pertinent information discussed during the midway meeting.

At the end of the evaluation review cycle, the supervisor conducts a formal Performance Review covering all of the appraisal period. Edwards (2005) points out that if all the other steps

have been followed, there will be no surprises. The employee will be aware of the supervisor's opinion regarding their performance. Supervisors would assign an overall rating for the evaluation period. If the employee disagrees, it should be documented. Supervisor's appraisals of their employees should be reviewed by their supervisor, and a process for an appeal is established. At the end of the annual performance review, the process begins again with an expectation-setting meeting for the next cycle (Edwards 2005).

MacLeod (1993) suggests that volunteer performance should be reviewed at the end of the probation period and annually after that. The focus of the volunteer is on the performance related to the job requirements. This is consistent with Holtz (1994) program and Edwards (2005).

MacLeod (1993) stated that the evaluation process begins with a review of the volunteer's accomplishments and provides feedback on progress made, followed by identifying problems and jointly develop strategies necessary to resolve. Most of the focus of the evaluation is to receive feedback from the volunteer on the how the program is meeting their expectations and what could be done to help them be more productive. Finally, goals are set for the next cycle and any additional training requirements are identified.

All three systems share similar components of setting goals, standards and criteria, monitoring on-going progress, problem solving, evaluation, and starting again back at goal setting (MacLeod 1993; Holtz 1994; Edwards 2005). Both ICMA and Edwards are employee-based systems in contrast to MacLeod's volunteer based system.

*Research Question #3: What Other Methods Have Been Used To Improve Performance Of Volunteer Officers?*

When a search for methods in use to enhance volunteer officer performance was attempted, this researcher found that there is a lack of information specific to volunteer officers. A search of the LRC at the U.S. Fire Administration produced no documents directly addressing the research question. Online search engines (Google, Excite, MSN) returned results related to training standards. The National Volunteer Fire Council (<http://www.nvfc.org>) provides information about the impact of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) rules and standards on volunteer firefighters that would include officers.

The lack of specific research and text on the performance of volunteer officers prompted this researcher to conduct a survey, which is addressed in the procedures sections of this document.

## Procedures

### *Research Methodology*

The purpose of this research is to assess performance evaluation programs and methods for improving volunteer officer performance within North Lincoln Fire & Rescue Fire District #1. A descriptive research method was used. The process included review of literature available, survey tool, and focus group.

### *Definition of Terms*

*Fire Ground Leader (FGL):* A certificate level of fire ground officer established by the Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training (DPSST).

### *Literature Review*

Literature review utilized on-line resources of the Lincoln & Tillamook County Library Public systems. This researcher accessed the Learning Resource Center (LRC) of the National Fire Academy (NFA) directly utilizing the internet. The Interlibrary Loan System was utilized through the local public library system. Extensive use of the internet was used to search for on-line resources and documents. North Lincoln Fire & Rescue (NLF&R) in-house texts were accessed and text was purchased to assure the latest editions were utilized.

### *Survey*

The purpose of the survey was to gather information to answer two of the research questions. What type of performance evaluation programs are being used by other agencies with volunteer personnel? What other methods have been used to improve performance of volunteer officers?

A draft of the survey was developed based on the research questions to be answered see (Appendix A; Appendix B). This draft was sent to test subjects, five fire chiefs, one police chief, a fire service consultant, the county emergency service director, and an educator. After feedback and minor changes, the survey was mailed to twenty-two agencies. A stamped, addressed envelope was included with the survey.

Agencies were selected based on this researcher's knowledge of the selected agency. The goal was to gather information on evaluation programs used with volunteers in leadership positions. The survey was sent to seventeen fire agencies, one city police department, one

hospital district, one library district, one school district and a nationwide disaster relief agency. Of the twenty-two agencies surveyed, eighteen responded to the follow survey questions:

1. Do you have volunteers in your organization serving as leaders, supervisors or managers?  
a) Yes b) No (If “No” go to question #8)
2. Do you conduct formal performance evaluations with these volunteer personnel?  
a) Yes b) No
3. Does your organization use any other tools or programs to evaluate and enhance the performance of volunteers?  
a) Yes b) No
4. If you are using a written form of appraisal system, how often are personnel evaluated?  
a) Once a year                      b) once in two years                      c) no set interval                      d) other
5. What are performance appraisals used for? Mark all that apply.  
a) correct behavior & enhance performance  
b) promotional consideration  
c) determine training needs  
d) incentive program with dollar value  
e) recognition or rewards without dollar value  
f) other
6. Do supervisors receive training on how to conduct performance appraisals?  
a) Yes b) No
7. Do you feel your system is effective in achieving the goal of the program?  
a) Yes b) No
8. What best describes your agency?  
a) Fire Service                      b) Private Non-profit                      c) Government                      d) Other

### *Focus Group*

A focus group of NLF&R officers was created to answer research question-4. What performance criteria do volunteer officers believe they should be evaluated on?

The focus group met on a regularly scheduled meeting night for the officers to assure high participation. This researcher arranged to have two paid Division Chiefs serve as facilitators. Information was sent to each facilitator for review in advance of the focus group's meeting. A meeting was held between this researcher and the facilitators to explain the process and answer questions.

All the participants were brought together and this researcher explained the process and goal of the focus group. It was emphasized that the process was for the purpose of research and not implementing an evaluation process. Participants were given written instructions see (Appendix F) and a copy of NLF&R Battalion Chief job description. The group was asked to answer the question - What performance criteria should volunteer battalion chiefs be evaluated on? Edwards (2005, p. 155), discussing performance criteria explains, "through job analysis, one can determine exactly what constitutes effective performance as well as ensure that the process meets legal requirements..." Put in simple terms, base your criteria on a good job description. The rank of Battalion Chief was selected because it is the highest-ranking volunteer officer in the organization.

The officers were then split into two groups, each with a Division Chief facilitating. This researcher split time between the two groups to answer questions that might arise. Each group met separately for 90 minutes the first night. On the second night, the groups met separately for

the first 60 minutes. During the last 30 minutes, the groups consolidated their findings and reached a consensus.

Each group kept notes during the focus group sessions. These notes were given to the facilitators who transcribed them and submitted them to this researcher. During the final session, where the groups' findings were consolidated and a consensus was reached, one of the facilitators kept notes while the other recorded the key points of the discussion on the board visible to the group. This researcher was present and observed all of the final session but did not participate in the exercise. This researcher reviewed all notes from all of the focus group sessions, summarizing the results in this research.

#### *Limitations and Assumptions*

The survey used to answer questions one and three of this research assumes the responses were accurate; being anonymous, it is not verifiable. Furthermore, the agencies surveyed were selected by this researcher to maximize survey results in both quality and quantity. Therefore, they are not representative of any segment or group for statistical purposes.

Using an anonymous survey limited the ability to follow up with agencies to clarify ambiguous information gathered from the survey tool. The survey questions alone were not comprehensive enough to gather sufficient data about evaluations being used, instead relied upon those surveyed to provide a copy of their evaluations form if they used one. In addition, this researcher did not consider that the evaluation document alone without policy or guidelines instructing on the application of the evaluations tool could yield inaccurate results. Therefore, the results are limited to this researcher's interpretation of the submitted documents. Two of the

five agencies that conduct formal evaluations with volunteers provided a copy of their evaluation document.

Given the time limitation allowed for the APR, this researcher was unable to locate prior research to answer question three - What other methods have been used to improve performance of volunteer officers?

The scope of the focus group was narrowed to selecting criteria for rank of volunteer Battalion Chief. This researcher believed this to be necessary to allow the group to focus a single job description in developing criteria requested. Doing this limited the resulting criteria to a single rank. This is more specific than research question three asked: What performance criteria do volunteer officers believe they should be evaluated on?

## Results

### *Research Question-1 What Type Of Performance Evaluation Programs Are in Use By Other Agencies With Volunteer Personnel.*

The Maryland GOSV program and the CASA program are very similar; both programs agree volunteers should be reviewed in the same manner as paid staff. Each of the programs have similar criteria and are based off of the volunteers' job description, and use the evaluations as a tool to receive feedback used to evaluate the overall volunteer program. The CASA program is a sample form based on a graphic rating scale of 1 to 5 (CASA 1999) where the GOSV program does not offer any suggestion to the type of assessment tool used (GOSV, Best practices). Both systems suggest a self-assessment by the volunteer. The GOSV program does not go into detail, leaving this researcher to believe that both supervisor and volunteer

would use the same criteria and tool. CASA, in contrast, has the volunteer evaluate the training and supervision provided by CASA (1999). Both GOSV and the CASA programs emphasize that assessments are to be positive and not negative experiences for the volunteers.

### *Survey Responses*

*Do you have volunteers in your organization serving as leaders, supervisors or managers?* Of the twenty-two agencies surveyed, eleven said they have leaders serving in volunteer positions.

*Do you conduct formal performance evaluations with these volunteer personnel?* Five of the eleven organizations who have leaders in volunteer positions conduct formal appraisals of these personnel.

*Does your organization use any other tools or programs to evaluate and enhance the performance of volunteers?* Five agencies reported using something other than a formal appraisal to enhance personnel performance. Two of these agencies that do conduct formal appraisals also use on-going training and required officers to complete Fire Ground Leader-1 training. Another agency that formally evaluates volunteers also gives bonus points on civil service exams to volunteers in good standing. Of the three agencies that did not use formal evaluations, one said they use person-to-person evaluations as needed, another uses training performance evaluations, and another said they used pre-appointment training and testing.

*If you are using a written form of appraisal system, how often are personnel evaluated?* Four of the five agencies using formal evaluations performed appraisals once a year, and one performed appraisals once every two years.

The fifth question of the survey asked, *what are performance appraisals used for?* Four of the five agencies using formal appraisals use them to correct behavior and enhance performance. Two of these were also determining training needs during evaluations, and one agency also said they are used to supervise personnel. One of the five agencies only uses appraisals to make sure that officers and the district are moving in the same direction.

*Do supervisors receive training on how to conduct performance appraisals?* Of those conducting formal appraisals, four of the five agencies said they do train or were implementing training for supervisors this year. Of the seven agencies that did not conduct formal appraisals of volunteer personnel, five reported training supervisors to evaluate personnel. I presume that it was for evaluations of paid personnel. The survey instrument was not detailed enough to determine further.

*Do you feel your system is effective in achieving the goal of the program?* Three of the five agencies doing formal appraisals said that the system was achieving the program goals. Two agencies reported they have not evaluated their system's effectiveness, so are uncertain if it meets desired goals. Of the seven performing informal evaluations, one felt their program is effective, one said their program was effective for career but not volunteers, three felt that their program was not effective, one was unsure of the effectiveness of their program, and one did not respond to the question.

The last question asked agencies to categorize their organization as fire service, private non-profit, government or other. Of the eighteen agencies responding, thirteen were fire service, one a private non-profit, three governments and one other.

Of the twenty-two agencies surveyed, five conducted formal performance evaluations. Two of these agencies submitted a copy of their evaluation form. Below is a summary based on their survey response and submitted forms.

The first agency, a fire district, uses a graphic rating scale (Edwards 2005) rating volunteers on a scale of one to five in nine areas. The criteria used are Job Knowledge, On-scene performance, Quality of work, Quantity of work, Judgment, Safety, Punctuality & Attendance, Interpersonal skills, and Appearance. The supervisors are trained in how to perform the appraisal and examples of performance standards are incorporated into their appraisal form. Supervisors are encouraged to give written comment in addition to the numerical score, and are required to explain a low score of one or two when given. The fire district evaluates volunteers once every two years for purposes of correcting behavior and enhancing performance, determining training needs and supervision of personnel. In addition to performance appraisals, this fire agency indicated they used the Fire Ground Leader (DPSST) training curriculum and certifications to enhance performance of their volunteers. The fire chief of this district feels that their evaluation system meets the goals of the program.

The second agency that provided program information was a private non-profit organization. They, like the first agency, also use a graphic rating system. Volunteers are rated in one of three levels: Needs Improvement, Meets Expectations, or Exceeds Expectations. Volunteers are evaluated in four areas: Competently performs requirements of job service description, Abides by policies, Effective customer relations and Dependability. This agency also requires supervisors to explain any rating in the Needs Improvement area. Volunteers are appraised each year for the stated reasons: to correct behavior, enhance performance, and

determine training needs. Agency two indicated that they were in the process of implementing training for supervisors on how to conduct performance evaluations. Like the first agency, this organization also believes that their evaluation system meets the program needs.

*Research Question #2 - What Are The Key Components To An Effective Performance Evaluation System?*

Holtz (1994, p. 92) evaluation process begins with the employees and supervisors meeting together to "...set goals, standards, and criteria for measuring employee performance". Edwards (2005, p. 155) starts the appraisal cycle with an expectation-setting or goal setting-meeting. "At the conclusion of the expectation-setting meeting, there should be a clear understanding as to what is expected during the appraisal period and how it will be evaluated". MacLeod (1993) summarizes the important components of the volunteer evaluation.

Performance review interviews should focus on performance relating to placement requirements, be constructive and positive, identifying both achievement and areas that need improvement, refer to improving performance from this point on, focus on goals, be jointly undertaken between volunteer and supervisor, face-to-face, be put down on paper and signed by both parties (p. 153).

All three systems share similar components of setting goals, standards and criteria, monitoring on-going progress, problem solving, evaluation and starting again back at the goal setting process (MacLeod, 1993; Holtz, 1994; Edwards, 2005). The three systems also emphasize on-going communication during the evaluation cycle to make the appraisal process continuous through the cycle, not an annual event.

*Research Question -3 What Other Methods Are In Use To Improve Performance Of Volunteer Officers?*

After searching the internet, and electronic catalogs at the public library system, this researcher did not find text or research specific to improving performance of the volunteer officer or volunteers in positions of leadership.

Survey respondents did report other practices to improve the performance of their volunteers. Many agencies reported informal person-to-person coaching as the preferred way to handle performance issues. On-going training was also cited as a method of enhancing performance. Question-3 of the survey asks - does your organization use any other tools or program to evaluate and enhance the performance of volunteers? Five surveyed responded yes. These included: on-going training and testing, pre-appointment evaluation, training performance evaluations, and person-to-person feedback. One agency awarded bonus points to volunteers in good standing when tested for a career position with the district (Appendix D).

Question-3 of the survey asked if agencies used any other method to evaluate and enhance performance. Three organizations *not* using formal systems reported using other methods to evaluate and enhance performance. Other methods included person-to-person coaching as needed, on-going training combined with evaluation and pre-appointment training, and testing (Appendix E).

*Research Question #4 - What performance criteria do volunteer officers believe they should be evaluated on?*

#### *Focus Group*

The focus group started by reviewing the Battalion Chief job description and decided that it needed to be updated. The group provided a variety of suggestions to change and update the

job description, and then recommended criteria taking into consideration the groups' recommendations. The group spent considerable time debating the need for a volunteer officer evaluation. After much debate, the group began identifying advantages that an evaluation could have, if administered correctly.

The focus group reached consensus and developed potential criteria for Battalion Chief evaluations. *Attendance*: Should be active in public relations, public education, and alarm response and training. *Leadership skill*: Demonstrate leadership on the fire scene, dealing with personnel and policy issues. *Knowledge*: Keep up to date regarding status and capability of assigned equipment and personnel. *Communication*: Demonstrate good communication skills. *Personnel performance*: Be accountable for performance of assigned personnel in training, attendance, alarm response and evaluations. *Long term planning*: Battalion Chiefs should be involved in strategic planning, budgeting, deployment planning and development of operational guidelines.

### Discussion

The first research question asked what performance evaluations program are in use by agencies to evaluate volunteers.

The Maryland GOSV program and the CASA program are very similar. Both programs agree volunteers should be review in the same manner as paid staff. Each of the programs base evaluation criteria on the volunteers job description and use the evaluations as a tool to receive feedback from volunteers (CASA 1999), [[www.gosv.state.md.us/volunteerism/bestprac/sec07](http://www.gosv.state.md.us/volunteerism/bestprac/sec07)]. Each system suggests a self-assessment by the volunteer. The Maryland GOSV program does not go into detail, leaving this researcher to believe that both supervisor and volunteer would use

the same criteria and tool. CASA, in contrast, has the volunteer evaluate the training and supervision provided by CASA [casanet.org]. Both GOSV and the CASA program emphasize that assessments are to be positive and not negative experiences for the volunteers. Another key objective of the CASA and GOSV program is to use the feedback from the evaluation process to improve the volunteer program overall (GOSV, Best practices), (CASA 2000).

A fire district responding to the survey reported using a graphic rating system that is rates both performance and traits of volunteers. The evaluation form included tips for the evaluator and examples of performance and how it would rate. This agency said they were using evaluations to correct behavior, enhance performance, and determine training needs and the supervision of personnel. The fire district commented in their survey response that they required Fire Ground Leader-1 certification. They did not elaborate on how this adopted State standard is in use in the evaluation process. The adoption of a recognized standard for setting criteria would be consistent with Edward (2005) use of certification systems in the performance appraisal process. The fire district differed from CASA's evaluation forms that include a section for goal setting and for the volunteer to rate specific areas of CASA's program asking questions aimed at program improvement (CASA 1999).

Research question two asked - *What are the key components to an effective performance evaluation system?*

Edwards (2005) says the major elements of a performance appraisal system are job based criteria, training, setting expectations, on-going feedback, self-assessment and performance review. Holtz (1994, p. 93) says "...goals set should be actions designed to fulfill the

responsibilities spelled out in the job description”. Holtz (1994) identifies key elements of the evaluation process as goal setting, setting standards, evaluating performance and resetting goals. Another step in the ICMA process is the *team* evaluation, where “you assess how well the team is doing in meeting its team goals and objectives” (p. 97). As an alternative, “team members can each offer an appraisal of how well they think their team is doing...”(p. 97).

MacLeod (1993, p. 154) “focus on how well the volunteer has met placement requirements.” Evaluate the volunteer’s accomplishments and provide feedback on progress made, followed by identifying problems and jointly develop strategies necessary to resolve. “Be sure to check with the volunteer whether or not their expectations about volunteering are being met.” (p.154) Finally, goals are set for the next cycle that includes additional training required.

MacLeod (1993), Holtz (1994) and Edwards (2005) share similar components of setting goals, job based criteria, monitoring on-going progress, problem solving, evaluation and starting again back at goal setting process. The three systems also emphasize on-going communication during the evaluation cycle to make the appraisal process continuous through the cycle, not an annual event.

Research question #3 asks - *What other methods have been used to improve performance of volunteer officers.*

Five agencies reported using something other than a formal appraisal to enhance personnel performance. Three of these agencies say they use some type of training program. Another agency offers an incentive of bonus points on civil service exams to volunteers in good standing. Another agency said they use person-to-person evaluations as needed. The survey

results showed that training programs are the most common method of improving performance in the fire service.

*Research question #4 asks - On what performance criteria do volunteer officers believe they should be evaluated?*

#### *Focus Group*

It is not surprising that a great deal of discussion early in the process centered on why volunteers should have formal evaluations. The facilitators allowed the group to debate the issue of a volunteer evaluation process. In a short amount of time, the group started generating advantages an officer evaluation program might bring to NLF&R.

The groups' focus was on the rank of volunteer Battalion Chief (BC) evaluation criteria. The first step was reviewing the job description of the Battalion Chief. The result was to recommend a job analysis of the position of Battalion Chief to facilitate the updating of the job description. The group felt that the job description re-write would need to occur before evaluation criteria could be finalized. The focus group agrees with Edwards (2005 p. 155) "through job analysis, one can determine exactly what constitutes effective performance..." The focus group felt that duties should not be too overwhelming to complete, but still give them purpose and pride in their position. This is consistent with Holtz (1994) in that goals should be challenging but also realistic with enough time available to complete.

Even though there is apprehension in the group about being evaluated, a consensus was reached that officer performance evaluations would be beneficial in officer development if approached in a positive manner. This agrees with MacLeod (1993) that performance review

should: “be constructive and positive...” (p. 153) and “constructive feedback contributes to increased confidence as well as competence” (p. 154).

The officer group of NLF&R, by participating in the focus group, started to examine their role, responsibility and accountability with the organization. The process of examining the Battalion Chief’s job description raised the awareness level of the group regarding leadership responsibility expected of volunteer officers. At the same time, this started a debate as to what the responsibilities of the volunteer officers should be. It was clear that most officers felt the level of expectation was going up. It was also clear that it would be a welcome change as long as they were involved in the setting of standards and the program was a positive one focusing on improvement.

### Recommendations

Edwards (2005, p. 147) says, “Performance appraisal, if done properly, can strengthen an organization as it prepares and develops the personnel of that organization”.

(Holtz 1994, p. 92) “Even if there were no formal methods, people would continue to evaluate each other’s work.” “If supervisors make decisions on the basis of these informal impressions, they will be wrong most of the time!” (p. 92).

I recommended that North Lincoln Fire & Rescue move forward with the implementation of a formal evaluation. My research shows that properly developed, implemented and managed personnel appraisal system will have multiple benefits to NLF&R. It will facilitate the aligning of the district’s goals with those of the volunteers and provide an opportunity for supervisors and subordinates to communicate each of their expectations.

*What needs to happen next within North Lincoln Fire & Rescue?* The research shows that evaluation criteria needs to be based on an accurate job description. The NLF&R focus group identified the need to update the current Battalion Chief job description. A committee of NLF&R officers should conduct thorough job analysis of the volunteer officers' positions, starting with the position of Battalion Chief. The next step is an action research project to develop a volunteer performance appraisal system that will include all of the volunteer ranks.

I also recommended changing the current employee evaluation system in use for the paid staff. The district's method of evaluating personnel should be consistent, regardless if paid or volunteer, although criteria will vary from position to position.

The expected benefits of a volunteer performance appraisal system will include the alignment of personnel goals with those of the district. I would expect increased productivity, more consistent performance, constructive feedback, training needs better identified and higher levels of job satisfaction.

I recommend sending out the survey to a larger number of agencies to find more organizations using an appraisal system with volunteers. Future researchers should consider a short survey to determine the existence of a system and their willingness to participate in a more comprehensive interview. This will facilitate a more comprehensive data collection and include policies, guidelines or training material that explains the use of evaluation forms reviewed. I would include more organizations outside the fire service such as, larger service organizations that rely on volunteer workers. In retrospect, I would seek existing research outside the fire

service on volunteer performance or research that examined the use of employee based evaluation systems with volunteers.

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## Appendix A

### *Survey Cover Letter*

Dear Sir or Madam,

My name is Don Baker; I am the Fire Chief for North Lincoln Fire & Rescue in Lincoln City, Oregon. I am conducting research as part of National Fire Academy, Executive Development class. My research subject is Volunteer Officer Performance Appraisals. Part of the research requires a survey of agencies that have volunteers in leadership positions to determine what type of performance evaluations are currently in use these volunteers.

I have kept the survey short and to the point because all are time is valuable, please take a moment and complete the survey and enclose it in the enclosed stamped and addressed envelope.

All information is confidential and will only be used for the purpose of the stated research.

If you currently have a performance evaluation tool, a copy of your form would be appreciated.

Thank You, Don Baker

Office (541) 996-2233 ext. 224

Fax (541) 996-5344

## Appendix B

### *Survey*

Please answer the following questions that apply to your agency and return the survey in the enclosed envelope. All information is confidential and will only be used for the purpose of the stated research.

1. Do you have volunteers in your organization serving as leaders, supervisors or managers?

*a) Yes    b) No (If "No" go to question #8)*

2. Do you conduct formal performance evaluations with these volunteer personnel?

*a) Yes    b) No*

3. Does your organization use any other tools or program to evaluate and enhance the performance of volunteers?

*a) Yes    b) No*

If yes please describe \_\_\_\_\_

4. If you are using a written form of appraisal system, how often are personnel evaluated?

*a) Once a year    b) once in two years    c) no set interval    d) other*

5. What are performance appraisals used for? Mark all that apply.

*a) correct behavior & enhance performance*

*b) promotional consideration*

*c) determine training needs*

*d) incentive program with dollar value*

e) *recognition or rewards without dollar value*

f) *other* \_\_\_\_\_

6. Do supervisors receive training on how to conduct performance appraisals?

a) *Yes*      b) *No*

7. Do you feel your system is effective in achieving the goal of the program?

a) *Yes*      b) *No*

8. What best describes your agency?

a) *Fire Service*      b) *Private Non-profit*      c) *Government*      d) *Other*

*Would you like a copy of the results? Yes      No*

THANK YOU!

## Appendix C

### *Survey Results of the Five Agencies That Conduct Formal Volunteer Evaluations*

1. Do you have volunteers in your organization serving as leaders, supervisors or managers?  
*a. Yes Five b. No*
2. Do you conduct formal performance evaluations with these volunteer personnel?  
*a. Yes Five b. No*
3. Does your organization use any other tools or program to evaluate and enhance the performance of volunteers?  
*a. Yes Two b. No Three*

If yes, please describe:

- a. On going training*
  - b. Fire Ground Leader-1 Certification*
  - c. Looking for ideas*
  - d. Incentive 5 points bonus on civil service testing Volunteers*
4. If you are using a written form of appraisal system, how often are personnel evaluated?  
*a. Once a year Four b. once in 2-years One c. no set interval d. other*

5. What are performance appraisals used for? Mark all that apply.
- a. correct behavior & enhance performance *Four*
  - b. promotional consideration
  - c. determine training needs *Two*
  - d. incentive program with dollar value
  - e. recognition or rewards without dollar value *One*
  - f. other *Assure that Officer goals match District; Supervision of personnel*
6. Do supervisors receive training on how to conduct performance appraisals?
- a. Yes *Four*
  - b. No *One*
7. Do you feel your system is effective in achieving the goal of the program?
- a. Yes *Three*
  - b. No
  - c. Not Sure *Two*
8. What best describes your agency?
- a. Fire Service *Four*
  - b. Private Non-profit
  - c. Government *One*
  - d. Other

## Appendix D

### *Survey Results of the Eleven Agencies that have Volunteers in Leadership Positions*

1. Do you have volunteers in your organization serving as leaders, supervisors or managers?  
a. Yes *Eleven*                      b. No
2. Do you conduct formal performance evaluations with these volunteer personnel?  
a. Yes *Five*                              b. No *Six*
3. Does your organization use any other tools or program to evaluate and enhance the performance of volunteers?  
a. Yes                      *Five*                      b. No                      *Six*

If yes, please describe:

- a. *On going training*
- b. *Fire Ground Leader-1 Certification*
- c. *Looking for ideas*
- d. *Incentive 5 points bonus on civil service testing Volunteers*
- e. *Person-to-person evaluations*
- f. *Pre-appointment training & testing*

4. If you are using a written form of appraisal system, how often are personnel evaluated?

a. Once a year    b. once in 2-years    c. no set interval    d. *other*

*Four*                      *One*                                      *One*                      *Career personnel*

5. What are performance appraisals used for? Mark all that apply.

a. correct behavior & enhance performance ----- *Eight*

b. promotional consideration ----- *One*

c. determine training needs ----- *Four*

d. incentive program with dollar value -----

e. recognition or rewards without dollar value ----- *One*

f. other    *Assure that Officer goals match District*

*Supervision of personnel*

6. Do supervisors receive training on how to conduct performance appraisals?

a. Yes    *Nine*    *One-Career only*                      b. No    *One*

7. Do you feel your system is effective in achieving the goal of the program?

a. Yes    *Four*                      b. No    *Three*    c. Not Sure    *Two*

8. What best describes your agency?

a. Fire Service    b. Private Non-profit    c) Government                      d. Other

*Nine*                                      *One*                                      *One*

## Appendix E

*Survey Results form Eighteen out of Twenty-two Agencies Surveyed.*

1. Do you have volunteers in your organization serving as leaders, supervisors or managers?  
a. Yes *Eleven*                      b. No *Seven*
2. Do you conduct formal performance evaluations with these volunteer personnel?  
a. Yes *Five*                              b. No *Six*
3. Does your organization use any other tools or program to evaluate and enhance the performance of volunteers?  
a. Yes                      *Five*                      b. No                      *Six*

If yes, please describe:

- a. *On going training*
- b. *Fire Ground Leader-1 Certification*
- c. *Incentive 5 points bonus on civil service testing Volunteers*
- d. *Person-to-person evaluations*
- e. *Pre-appointment training & testing*
- f. *Looking for ideas*
- g. *Training performance evaluations*

4. If you are using a written form of appraisal system, how often are personnel evaluated?

a. Once a year    b. once in 2-years    c. no set interval    d. *other*

*Four*                      *One*                      *One*                      *Career personnel*

5. What are performance appraisals used for? Mark all that apply.

a. correct behavior & enhance performance ----- *Eight*

b. promotional consideration ----- *One*

c. determine training needs ----- *Four*

d. incentive program with dollar value -----

e. recognition or rewards without dollar value ----- *One*

f. other    *Assure that Officer goals match District*

*Supervision of personnel*

6. Do supervisors receive training on how to conduct performance appraisals?

a. Yes    *Nine*    *One-Career only*                      b. No    *One*

7. Do you feel your system is effective in achieving the goal of the program?

a. Yes    *Four*                      b. No    *Three*    c. Not Sure    *Three*

8. What best describes your agency?

a. Fire Service                      b. Private Non-profit                      c) Government                      d. Other

*Thirteen*

*One*

*Three*

*One*

## Appendix F

### *Focus Group Instructions*

September 9, 2004

To: Volunteer Officer Evaluations Focus Group

From: Chief Don Baker

Re: NFA-EFO Research Project

#### Instructions:

I am required to complete an applied research project as part of my National Fire Academy, Executive Development class. My research subject is volunteer officer performance appraisals. Part of the research requires a focus group of volunteer officers to answer the question, “What performance criteria do volunteer officers believe they should be evaluated on”?

A few things to keep in mind:

- The goal should be to help a person be successful as an officer.
- Performance evaluations should be a positive experience.
- The communication that takes place during the evaluation needs to be two way allowing the officer to give feedback and make suggestions.
- Criteria should not be subjective, such as “attitude”. It should be objective, such as “attendance”.
- Criteria should be measurable and based on performance not personal traits.

Because research needs to be very specific and criteria for performance should be based on job expectations, I am asking that the group focus on the highest-ranking volunteer officer - the Battalion Chief. Please review the job description, make comments or recommendations, and then answer the question below.

1. What performance criteria should volunteer Battalion Chiefs be evaluated on?